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LETTERS TO NERVOUS PEOPLE

LETTERS ON PSYCHOTHERAPEUTICS

BY

PROFESSOR H. OPPENHEIM
OF BERLIN UNIVERSITY

TRANSLATED BY

ALEXANDER BRUCE, M.D.

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EDITOR OF THE 'REVIEW OF NEUROLOGY AND PSYCHIATRY'

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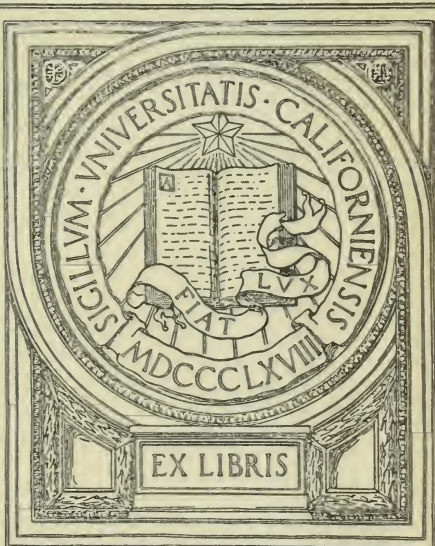
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LETTERS ON
PSYCHOTHERAPEUTICS

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THESE letters by Professor Oppenheim on the treatment of various forms of functional nervous derangement of the neurasthenic or psychasthenic type appear to me to give so much valuable information which is not to be found in the ordinary text-books, that I have thought it desirable to make their contents available to English-speaking members of the medical profession by this translation, in which as far as possible an endeavour has been made to give a literal rendering of the original German text.

ALEXANDER BRUCE.

EDINBURGH, *February* 1907.

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PREFACE

FROM the letters which in the course of the last few years I have had to send to nervous patients, I have selected a number in which the psychotherapeutic point of view is the main consideration. The originals have for the most part served merely as models. They have had to undergo many changes in view of publication, much being introduced into them which was in reality reserved for personal explanation. To those of my young colleagues especially, who desire to occupy themselves with psychotherapy—and that is almost equivalent to saying with treatment in general—I hope that these letters will afford some guidance which in some respects may be more welcome to them than many of the writings which deal theoretically with the indications and the nature of psychotherapy. In suitable cases these letters might even be given into the hands of the patient himself—and this is a feature which I have found wanting in the writings on psychotherapy known to me, even although many of them may in their scientific value far surpass what is offered here.

As may be seen, I have not confined myself exclusively to the neuroses, bearing in mind the fact that psychotherapy has a word to say in every case.

I intend in the course of next year to follow up these letters with a further series.

H. OPPENHEIM.

BERLIN, *January* 1906.



LETTERS ON PSYCHOTHERAPEUTICS

DEAR MRS X.,

I failed to satisfy myself to-day that our long interview had led to a satisfactory and tranquillising result for you. Whenever it seemed to me that I had transplanted my own convictions into your mind and had delivered you from the burden of your morbid fears, I looked up again into an unbelieving face which revealed your inner torment, and all my efforts seemed to have been in vain. I know too that it is difficult for you to follow with persistent attention what is said to you. So from this letter, which you can read at your leisure at some convenient time, and with interruptions if necessary, you may learn what I think of your condition, and in what way you may attain to the recovery which you so ardently desire.

You constantly demand from your physician a remedy which would free you from your

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troubles, and you reproach me with the fact that instead of affording you this aid out of our vast treasure-store of such remedies, I call upon you yourself, upon your intelligence and your energy, and urge you on to self-help. Although I do feel that you give me your confidence, yet you are not very responsive to my encouragement, and you always think it necessary to assert that your troubles are independent of your thoughts, your ideas and your moods, and you appeal to the fact that frequently in the middle of an engrossing conversation, and even sometimes in your sleep, you are attacked by them, and that the very moment you are roused, you immediately realise the whole misery of your condition. Against these facts I raise no objection, but I would ask you now to follow my explanation of the matter.

You remember the days when you were so severely shaken by that most unhappy occurrence, when you gave yourself up entirely to despair. It was at that time that your nervous system lost its balance, and that those disturbances of your health appeared which must be regarded as the direct results of your violent

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emotion. Now, while experience shows that in a nervous system which has hitherto been healthy and vigorous such disturbances of equilibrium will rapidly disappear after their cause has gone, you were immediately seized by the idea that such a multitude of troubles could result only from an incurable brain disease. Under the depressing influence of this idea you began to withdraw within yourself, gradually to circumscribe your usual occupations, and to lie in wait, as it were, anxiously listening and watching for morbid sensations.

At this point I should like to enlighten you with regard to a psychological process which plays an important part in the origination, and more particularly in the firm establishment of nervous conditions. That is the power of *attention and introspection to originate and to develop such conditions*. In the human organism forces are constantly at play which are not connected with sensation, and of which the healthy individual is unconscious. These are the processes of circulation, of metabolism, of the movements of the intestines, of part of the secretory processes, etc. Most

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of these actions may, however, be rendered conscious, may become sensations, under the influence of a sharpened attention, of a strained, persistent self-observation.

This is most easily perceived in regard to the action of the heart. Even a healthy man may be aware of the throbbing in the region of his heart and the pulsation in his ears after a quick run or climbing a hill, or when in the stillness of the night he lies on his left side, with his attention on the alert ; and this will most easily happen if, as the result of physical over-exertion, excitement, the use of alcohol or a heavy meal, the action of his heart is exaggerated and unusually strong. Indeed every one is aware of this fact. For the healthy person there is nothing disturbing in it ; he ignores it, goes to sleep over it, and in the morning has forgotten it. Very different is it with the anxious listener who, suspecting that his heart is affected, now fixes all his attention upon it. Very soon the inevitable consequence of constant repetition makes itself felt. Finer and finer grows his mental hearing : more and more conscious is he of the throbbing and pulsing. Soon the silence of the night or a

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certain posture of his body cease to be requisite; he is always conscious of the pulsation, and now not merely in the region of his heart; he may become painfully aware of it in various parts of his body. And as a rule it does not end with these distressing sensations; a new factor appears, a *real functional disturbance of the heart*; the heart rebels as it were against this surveillance, which not only accelerates, but may even inhibit its action and render it irregular.

And so it is with all the organs of the body which act spontaneously (automatically or mechanically, like a clock); they get out of order and become functionally defective if, as the result of the attention and self-observation directed towards them, impulses flow to them from the centres of consciousness and will, in the same way as they flow to the organs (*e.g.* the muscles) which are normally under the control of the will.

Whenever you succeed in controlling the action of your heart by means of introspection, there flows from your brain to your heart a current of innervation which disturbs the automatic movement of the organ. You

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now know whom you have to thank for the irregularity in the action of your heart. I have frequently proved this to myself: if I succeeded in feeling your pulse without your becoming aware of it, holding your attention by a conversation which interested you, the action of your heart was always absolutely regular. If, however, I tried it under your control, whilst your attention was anxiously directed to your heart, its action at once became irregular, and you experienced the very unpleasant sensation of palpitation.

Your headache also I ascribe to this source. Originally it may have been a real headache, the result of your nervous shock. There is no one who has not at some time had a transient feeling of pain in the head or in some other part of the body, quite apart from those caused by injuries or painful diseases. Out of a thousand various kinds of causes I will mention only an extremely common one: the pains which result from straining muscles or nerves. Every sudden awkward movement may in this way cause pain in different parts of the body, but very specially so in nervous persons, in whom the mechanical excitability

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of the nerves—that is, their sensitiveness to pressure and strain—is usually exaggerated. As a rule, however, this pain is quite transient. But here again the law of which I have already been speaking comes into force: under the stimulating influence of introspection the tiny, perishable seed-grain of pain grows into the firm, strong, enduring tree of neuralgia (or psychalgia). Then, with regard to the nature and cause of your insomnia, no further explanation is now required, as you yourself attribute it to your palpitation and headache. There is only this to add—that nothing more promptly banishes sleep than a condition of anxiety, of apprehension, of nervous waiting for the coming of sleep.

You meet me now, indeed, with the argument that you frequently succeed in falling asleep at first, but that you suddenly waken with violent palpitation. You think this demolishes my theory. But I do not lay down my weapons before that argument. When once this intimate connection has become established between the mental processes and certain physical functions—the heart's action for instance—then even in

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dreams it maintains its power ; the mental excitement which an anxious dream brings with it has then the power to exercise a disturbing, inhibiting influence upon the mechanism of the heart's movements, and the excitement of the palpitation thus caused is sufficiently violent to put an end to your light sleep.

This information with regard to the development of nervous symptoms is not sufficient for you. You still desire further proof that these explanations apply to you and to your sufferings.

I would remind you then merely of two facts : firstly, that at the commencement of your illness you experienced a time of complete well-being after consultation with me. The efficacy of these medical consultations lay, however, entirely in the encouragement which I gave you, the drugs prescribed for you being for the most part quite indifferent. Then when that was no longer sufficient, I ordered you to go on a journey to the South, and you had hardly reached Rapallo when your troubles vanished as if by magic. Now, however highly we may value the healing

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power of climate, it could not have worked so rapid a cure. No, it was the new, powerful impressions that held your senses and attention captive, and in addition to this, your firm belief in the result ; and so for the space of six weeks you were free from all your troubles, and apparently cured.

I earnestly hope and desire that you will accept this explanation as to the nature and origin of your trouble without doubting and without secret resistance. If once this were gained, it would be an easy matter for me to cure you in spite of the long duration of your illness.

Naturally, you will find at first that I am leading you over a stiff and up-hill path, upon which your progress will not be steadily forwards, but rather that of "two steps forwards, one backwards"; then, however, it will grow steadily easier and less toilsome. So away with the doubt and faintheartedness which have made the fight against your troubles so very hard both for you and for me !—Yours very sincerely H. O.

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Letter to a lady (a well-known authoress) who suffered so much from a nervous eye complaint of a very painful nature that for a period of six years she had to give up using her eyes for writing, reading, etc. After she had tried many treatments in vain, she came in despair to me. I realised that the condition had a psychogenic origin, but the patient disagreed so entirely with this view that she would have regarded the mere suggestion of it as a sign of professional ignorance. It was necessary, therefore, to veil the mental treatment ; but by energetically and persistently persevering with the course which I regarded as the right one, I succeeded so far that she was able to use her eyes for five to six hours a day, almost as well as before the trouble commenced. But all my subsequent endeavours to make her independent of treatment, to throw her on herself, were baffled ; she was still under the dominion of the idea that her improvement was merely the result of the local treatment, and that she could not get on without it. I therefore resolved to write her the following letter :—

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DEAR MADAM,

You will be surprised to-day to receive an answer from me which may appear to you to be a curt refusal to your request. I am aware, however, that you have the fullest confidence in me, and that you will regard this new, and as it may seem to you peculiar, attitude as a measure adopted for your benefit.

To put the surprising fact directly before you, I am not at this time disposed to respond to your wishes ; I would prefer to decline to resume your usual treatment.

May I recall to you your times of complete despair ? It was upon me that you fixed your last hope. I had treated you, however, for more than half a year without any marked or permanent result. You then rather counted on a change of methods, but I held firmly to my original plan. I merely desired that you should come to me more frequently, prolonged the duration of each sitting, and encouraged you to persevere, and still to persevere, as I could guarantee the certainty of your recovery. Then came great im-

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provement, ever greater and more marked ; soon you could use your eyes for hours without a strain, and you rejoiced in the long-lost pleasure of being independent in your actions.

If occasionally some reminder of the old evil made itself felt, you merely required a more frequent repetition of the treatment in order to restore you rapidly to your condition of activity. But in one point I have never succeeded—in persuading you to renounce one detail of the treatment, in convincing you that your trouble is rooted in the imagination, that firm, unswerving self-confidence alone is necessary to enable you to retain the power of your eyes, and that every doubt, every anxious absorption in yourself is calculated to bring about a relapse.

The conviction of an organic basis for your eye-trouble was too firmly rooted in you, thanks on the one hand to the circumstance that all your life you have had badly formed eyes, and that you have always been accustomed to glasses, but more especially to the fact that you have been undergoing years of treatment from oculists whose verdicts and opinions have

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had a very disquieting effect upon you, whether owing to erroneous diagnosis, or (as I suspect to your misapprehension of the expressions which they used. That sank too deep into your memory. And there was also your great self-confidence. Your generally-admired mental power, and the acuteness and correctness of your judgment, along with your consciousness of this faculty, have given to you such self-confidence that not only are you better armed against suggestion than the average person, but it seems to me that you are also somewhat inaccessible to advice or explanation with regard to errors in your views. I very easily perceived that your opinion as to your own trouble and its origin was exceedingly firm and immovable. Even the most cautious attempt at a hint that your trouble might be of mental origin caused such a reaction that everything seemed lost, and it required all my dialectic dexterity to restore my authority as a physician. I had, therefore, to resolve that the mental exhortation, from which alone I looked for benefit, should be veiled and disguised in the cloak of some treatment which was new to you; and which I trans-

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formed into therapeutic measures by holding constantly before you my conviction as to the certainty of the result, by prophesying recovery as an inevitable event, and so to a certain extent by my enthusiasm carrying you on to belief.

Then I had won the game. You were convinced that the methods I employed, allowing you to read under the application of the electric current, etc., were the necessary and effectual treatment. Your trust in it was so great, however, that you got firm hold of the idea that your eyes should be permanently under this treatment, and that they could only be spurred on to full activity by a "charge of electric energy." Then all my efforts to convince you of the permanency of your recovery and to make you independent of the treatment were baffled by the tenacity of your imagination, and again and again I had to give way. But it seems to me now that the time has come when I can no longer withhold this explanation. I am quite aware that I am taking some risk. But even at the risk of losing your confidence, the time has now come when you must know that it was not electricity,

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but faith and enthusiasm which have cured you. I feel justified in the hope that you yourself will now assume the guidance, and that since your eyes are now truly opened, you will attain in the only way in which it cannot fail you the happiness of permanent recovery.

—With kind regards, yours very truly,

H. O.

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DEAR SIR,

The despairing letter which you have sent me to-day shall be answered at once. Certainly I do sympathise with you, for to the sleepless, night is full of distress and day devoid of joy and pleasure; but I know also that this epoch in your life, which to you seems unending, will shortly give place to the happy condition of complete health, and will soon be quite forgotten, even by you. As yet, indeed, you will not listen to my assurance; you cannot imagine that a man who has so completely forgotten how to sleep, on whom hypnotics have begun to exercise a prejudicial effect, can ever return to the normal condition in which a period of waking is, as a matter of course, followed by a period of sleep.

Now, although I admit that this faint-heartedness is also a symptom of your disease, still at the same time I am convinced that you yourself can be instrumental in mastering it, and with it your illness. You say yourself that during the whole day you cannot help

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thinking of the coming night and its distress. This thought completely masters you, and you have so entirely given in to it that you are more and more limiting your active habits, and are even neglecting your hobbies, such as riding. But in so doing you are simply barring the path by which you would most rapidly and certainly attain recovery. For the chief requisite for return of your natural sleep is banishment of anxiety about your sleep.

For that end the following conditions must be complied with. In the first place the time which you now squander in racking your brains and thinking about yourself, must be given to work. This work should be sufficiently interesting; it should at least occupy your attention. It is therefore advisable that it should be very varied. Two hours during which your mind is occupied with your business might be followed by an hour of physical work; and even there the uniformity should not be too constant. You might carve, plane, model, photograph, work in your garden—choose for yourself what pleases you best. But I should specially desire you to

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ride or motor for an hour during the forenoon or afternoon.

You think your strength will not be sufficient for all this ; but that is a mistake. Your great feelings of weakness, which form an outcome from your despondency, are not founded upon real weakness. Nor do I intend that you should wear and worry yourself all day long. No ; make a long break before, and a small one after the midday meal. Before the evening meal, take a short hour's walk, but have a friend with you who can entertain you. A great deal depends upon the right use of the evening hours. On no account let yourself occupy them with anxious forebodings about the night. But, on the other hand, it is not at present wise to take up your mind with too exciting thoughts, as the strong after-impression of feeling and fancy may counteract the tendency to sleep. You must find out for yourself whether a quiet game (cards, halma, chess, or patience), the reading of a serious or an amusing book, the perusal of an illustrated paper, or a chat with a friend will be most certain to give you that tranquillity of mind through the vestibule

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of which you will pass into the temple of sleep.

When you have spent your days and evenings in this way, ideas of anxiety and uneasiness may certainly creep up at times, but they will not have the mastery over you, and they will be shaken off so quickly that no soothing draught will be required to wrap you in refreshing slumber. Carry out my instructions then in complete confidence, and I will restore you to the sound health¹ of two years ago.—Yours faithfully, O.

¹ This recovery was as a matter of fact somewhat slow, but it came after three months.

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MY DEAR MRS Z.,

You asked me yesterday whether I still regarded your illness as curable, and whether I was still convinced that you could attain to recovery only through practice and self-restraint. Once more you urged upon me your doubts, recalling the fact that for almost ten years now you have been fighting against your troubles, and that you have always found by experience that rest alone brings you relief, every attempt at a cure which led you in other directions doing you harm.

Now I have every regard for experience in general and also for the personal experience of the patient, but I know too how careful one must be in estimating this factor in nervous cases. So frequently in such cases, what occurs is simply a direct and inevitable result of what is expected. The conviction that such and such a remedy or such and such a proceeding has a harmful effect brings with it the seed of that harmful effect. For many years you have had those uncomfortable

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sensations and distressing pains in your legs, which, rendering as they do almost every movement impossible, make life very bitter to you. In particular you think that every attempt at walking which out of a sense of duty you have made has excited the pain and left more discomfort behind. And in spite of all the confidence which you have in me, you still go to the gymnastic cure which I have ordered for you with reflections and hesitations, begging me to make you constant concessions.

At the same time you yourself emphasise the fact that occasionally you may make the demand of a severer muscular strain upon your limbs, especially—and these are your own words—when, all eagerness and enthusiasm for some concern which lies at your heart, you rouse yourself to make such an effort. May I remind you of the entertainment given by the Women's Benevolent Society, at which your activity excited the wonder of your friends? Now I have not the least intention of turning this contradiction into a trap, and of explaining to you, as unfortunately has already been done by someone else, that your sufferings arise

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from fancy and imagination, and that after all you are not really desirous of being well.

No, the conditions are unfortunately not so simple as that.

You have undoubtedly become nervous both on account of the excitement and the painful experiences through which you have passed and of the accompanying physical overstrain, and since that time you have been subject to a number of troubles which are entirely neurasthenic in character. I am firmly convinced that you feel the pains and distressing sensations in your limbs exactly as you describe them; but you are organically sound, and so are your limbs. There is neither weakness, stiffness, nor muscular wasting, and I am satisfied that after systematic exercise you would be able to climb a high hill. And yet those frequent pains after the slightest exertion, after a single turn through your room! How is this contradiction to be explained?

In all my efforts to put this before you in words, I found myself in a very difficult position, for I could easily see how greatly such explanations excited you, how unsympa-

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thetic and unsatisfactory they appeared to you. It was most of all against the idea conveyed in the word "psychical" that you rebelled, for to you it was synonymous with "psychoses." And this erroneous idea upset you all the more as it awoke painful reminiscences of the physician who once called your mental responsibility in question. I should like at once to state this to you: I regard you as thoroughly sound in mind, and I have not the slightest fear that you will ever be subject to any mental disturbance. You must be quite aware, however, that even in the healthy and mentally robust person, mind and body are most intimately connected, and that they never cease to exert upon each other a constant reciprocal influence.

The greater part of these processes escape our self-perception; so quietly, so finely, so secretly do they act that the Ego, standing listening at the threshold, is quite insensible of them. And in nervous people these processes are even more intimate, more mysterious.

Some years ago your limbs were injured from an over-strain, and for a long time they caused you pain. Then you were persuaded

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by a friend to undergo that unfortunate severe course of treatment with massage and gymnastics, a treatment which could not but greatly increase your troubles. From that time onwards you became timid and anxious. The process of movement ceased for you to be mechanical and automatic ; without your desiring or knowing it to be so, you are never quite free from fear and anxious thought. As the healthy person walks along, his mind is not occupied with the process ; like some machine once set going, the movement continues without requiring that the mind should supervise or take part in it. The will, indeed, does not merely give the first impulse ; it may at any time alter the measure, or modify and interrupt the mechanism of the gait ; but the act of walking is in itself so mechanical that the mind may be occupied at the same time with the deepest problems, and obstacles or dangers may be avoided quite unconsciously. But it is very different with a person who in this respect follows the act of walking with attention and anxious self-control. For him every step is an undertaking, in which both his muscles and his mind are involved. And thus the con-

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ditions for the onset of uncomfortable sensations are brought about. The mechanical process is now transformed into a psychical one (or a psycho-physical one) which throws its waves of excitation into the sensory centres of the brain, and thus causes the ever-increasing discomforts of pain from fatigue, stiffness, tension, vibration, etc. And these sensations are always calculated to cause more and more disturbance and inhibition in the mechanism of walking, so that real stiffness and inco-ordination of the muscular functions gradually develop.

When once this co-relation has been established, the patient cannot, even with the best will, sever the chain with one wrench. However hard he now tries to walk along with his thoughts in the clouds, still his gait at first remains affected, and the painful sensations, though they may not always appear at once, may follow the exertion.

So our business is to restore to your healthy limbs the independence which belongs to them, to liberate them from the domination of your mind, to give back to them the automatism to which the normal man owes the freedom and the joy of movement. For this purpose a

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systematic course of treatment is necessary, and you must undertake it with hope and conviction. I lay stress chiefly upon gymnastic exercises, which will begin with the smallest movements and will gradually—and always along with constant simultaneous occupation of your mind—extend to the larger movements. If your perseverance does not fail, I can promise that you will recover.—With kindest regards, Yours faithfully, H. O.

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DEAR MRS A.,

During the conversation that you had with me some days ago, you were so excited that your power of perception was materially lowered. I hope that you will be able to follow me with more composure now as I lay my views before you in writing.

The main object of medical treatment is to remove the cause of disease. This, unfortunately, cannot be accomplished in your case, for the cause of your troubles is your unhappy marriage. You live beside a man who is indifferent to you, whose presence inspires you with aversion rather than sympathy or love. To this unhappiness, to the natural depression which this want of harmony engenders, are added the constant friction and discord which have such a bad effect upon your spirits—a combination of worries which even the soundest nervous system could not permanently resist. Separation from your husband, which your religion would render very difficult, is entirely out of the question on account of the sad effects

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which it would have upon your relations with your children.

So here the question is one of endurance.

How then are you to render your existence bearable and satisfactory ?

And synonymous with this question is that other : what remedy can help you ? To this there is only one answer : you must be done with this fruitless inactivity. You stare fixedly into the grey heavens of your unhappiness, as if by this means you could rend the clouds ; you pass your days in sombre reveries, in dumb, fruitless complaining against your fate, hardly even accessible to the delicious prattle and tenderness of your children, whom you could make so happy.

Here, then, you must make a radical change. All your slumbering interests, your gifts and capacities must be aroused in order to fill your days with work which will bring you satisfaction. Take the care, upbringing and education of your daughter, who is now of school age, into your own hands. But that is not sufficient. You are endowed with a talent for writing and languages, and that also may be of service to you. Make up your mind without delay to

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translate an English work into German, or vice versa ; try to write reviews of concerts or plays, or of books for the foreign journals. With your abilities and your wide connections it should not be difficult for you to find a first-class journal which would accept your contributions.

If I have rightly gauged your character and inclinations, this employment would prove a great stimulus to you, and the satisfaction of the worker, though indeed it cannot offer you complete compensation for the highest happiness which you are missing, would yet give to your life an aim and a purpose, and would furnish a guidance and a goal for your efforts.

I am persuaded that I can now promise you that the growing contentment in activity and in thus fulfilling a duty will directly transform itself into health ; that is to say, you will by this means cast away at least the greater part of your troubles.—With kind regards, Yours sincerely, O.

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MY DEAR PRESIDENT,

I cannot conceal from you the fact, which you have already ascertained from other sources, that you show the premonitory symptoms of a disease of the spinal cord. This admission is not, however, as you fear, synonymous with the sentence "the beginning of the end." There is no reason for you to despair. We doctors regard and welcome it as a marked advance in our scientific knowledge that we are now in a position to diagnose a nervous disease of this kind in its first commencement. This is undoubtedly a great gain for the patient, as on account of this knowledge a judicious, experienced physician may, at least in many cases, by the timely regulation of the mode of life and the prescription of certain remedies, arrest the progress of the disease or retard its development. This advice may, however, and should as a general rule be given without the patient himself being made aware of the diagnosis, for the ideas as to the nature of this disease which prevail in lay circles, and indeed

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among many doctors of the old school, arise from the knowledge of the disease in its advanced and fully established form, since it was only in this completely developed stage that it was recognised. Then, indeed, its very noticeable symptoms were obvious even to the uninitiated. This picture, sad enough indeed in itself, was rendered still gloomier by the misery and despair which popular fancy has associated with the conception of locomotor ataxia.

Now, however, we neurologists know that this disease frequently runs a very mild course, that a man showing certain early symptoms of such a disease may for ten to twenty-five years and even longer retain his capacity for work and enjoyment. This for a man of thirty to forty years is almost tantamount to the expectation of a whole normal life time. But on the other hand what danger to the peace of mind, what destruction of happiness in life may be caused if the knowledge that such a disease has begun to develop is imparted to the patient without being combined with the consoling information as to the nature and course of the benign forms of this trouble! In unceasing

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anxiety and fear, in daily expectancy of some fresh symptom, of some increase or aggravation of his troubles, does the poor man waste his life; and I have frequently found that this wretched apprehension and excitement cause a nervousness and mental depression which in their effects are much more momentous than is the commencing spinal disease.

From this miserable condition I desire to protect you and I would ask you to take this advice deeply to heart: do not bear yourself as one who is condemned; as one who, affected by a progressive, incurable disease, will soon fall a victim to paralysis. On the strength of my own experience I give you the assurance that your condition of health will not necessarily in ten years' time be essentially different from what it is at present. But I would also strenuously exhort you to observe all the precautionary rules laid down for you, to avoid all unaccustomed strain or indulgence such as can only be undertaken with impunity by a man in full vigour and absolute soundness of health. I would advise you also to be thoroughly examined once a year by an experienced physician. But apart from these

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restrictions, you should as far as possible feel yourself and bear yourself like a healthy man, remaining attached to your work, and not withdrawing yourself from the pleasures of social intercourse.

With the hope that my predictions will come true in your case, as they have already done with regard to many of your fellow-sufferers,—
I am, Yours faithfully, O.

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MY DEAR MR B.,

You tell me that none of your nervous troubles cause you so much distress and despair as the decline of your artistic imagination. The spring which used to bubble up so spontaneously, so abundantly, so gaily, now dries up more and more. That which your mind used to create in play, the production of which gave you delight and happiness, is now the result of a joyless, slow, fatiguing toil. You have therefore concluded that you are suffering from a severe brain disease which will lead to insanity, and you suspect that with the diagnosis of neurasthenia I am only seeking *solaminis causa* to disguise from you your incurable disease. I see to my pain that my encouragement, which was at first so helpful to you, is now overborne by this ever-growing conviction, and that you are working yourself into a state of despondency and despair, which may be very dangerous to a nature so impulsive as yours.

Your position would indeed be a very deplorable one if your views and ideas about

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yourself were correct, and if your disease did in reality bring with it a diminution of your mental power and a permanent paralysis of your imagination. But I have satisfied myself, from repeated, intimate conversations with you, and from systematic and detailed investigation of your mental functions, undertaken to satisfy you, that there can be no question of any diminution in your intelligence and memory. Of course that which constitutes the artistic imagination is not indeed accessible to such an investigation ; but it is contrary to all scientific experience that such a quality of the mind should alone be affected by a nervous disease, whilst all its other elementary forces should be conserved.

On the other hand, it is quite certain that these higher mental functions may be for a time inhibited and rendered fallow, and it is a particularly important fact that a simple nervousness or neurasthenia may give rise to this inhibiting effect. A despondent state of mind and insomnia are responsible in the first place ; their influence is greatest of all. Hypochondriacal depression is calculated, as hardly any other mental condition is, to check the flow of the imagination, to stifle that inspira-

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tion which bears the artist up to the creative heights.

You maintain, of course, that your depression first arose from your perception of the diminution of your mental power ; but there you are entirely mistaken : depression is a symptom of neurasthenia, and in the form of that disease which is accompanied by insomnia, it constitutes an almost constant symptom. It is certainly exaggerated by your hypochondriacal imaginations and fears, and in this respect you have yourself materially contributed to make the trouble as distressing and intractable as it is.

In spite of that, I look forward to your complete recovery, and I am convinced that with recovery from your nervousness, the inhibition upon your mental powers will lessen, and will give place to your old versatility and powers of imagination. The road to this goal, however, lies through the doors of faith and confidence. You must make my conviction your own. You must with all your might suppress this imagination of a progressing brain disease which is sapping your mental power, and allow the thought that you are curable and that you will be cured to grow more and more

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vivid and commanding, until it has become an indestructible and predominant element in your mental life. The hypnotic treatment which will be carried on in the meantime will help to awaken and to foster this conviction in you.

—Yours very faithfully,

H. O.

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MY DEAR GENERAL,

I think it is advisable that I should somewhat expand the brief opinion to which I was obliged to confine myself yesterday by an explanation in writing, especially as it seemed to me from your expression that you went away unconvinced.

An eminent physician, for whom I have much esteem, has told you that your troubles, especially your vertigo, are caused by calcification of the arteries. You, sir, heard in this your death-sentence, and since then the encyclopædia has revealed to you all the sufferings and terrors with which you may expect to be overtaken.

I would, however, explain to you as the result of the most careful examination and the most absolute conviction on my part, that your anxiety is unfounded.

Since you have a certain amount of information and scientific knowledge, I may speak to you upon this matter almost as to a colleague. One is certainly justified, when a man of your age complains of vertigo, in suspecting calcifica-

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tion of the arteries to be the cause of the trouble, since it constitutes the common senile change, and vertigo forms one of its most frequent symptoms. But—apart from the fact that in senile calcification of the vessels this vertigo is frequently a temporary and not always a serious sign—one is by no means justified in assuming that the appearance of this symptom in later life is in itself, and without further evidence, the sign of such a cause. This is an error which in my experience is far too frequently made, to the detriment of the patient. It is first of all essential to closely examine and analyse the symptom in itself. I shall not here go into all the numerous forms of vertigo and the various sites of its origin, but shall pass at once to your own case. Two years ago, after having over-loaded your stomach, you had a real attack of vertigo, which was repeated several times during the day, until, by vomiting and diarrhœa, the contents of your stomach were evacuated. Since that time the fear of vertigo has overpowered you. In my experience it is neither new nor uncommon to find that a man who has shown his intrepidity and his contempt

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of death on many a battle-field, who is a hero in war, may be overcome by some dread of illness, by some anxiety, or even by some pain, and may be distressed by it in a way that is in sharp contrast to his whole personality. Your remembrance of that vertigo is so lively that the mere idea of it suffices to re-awaken the symptom, or at least an imitation of it which very nearly approaches the reality. That this idea is present in your case is quite certain from the consideration of your symptoms. You admit that you almost never have vertigo at home, but as soon as you leave the house, and especially if you find yourself alone in the street, far from home, the remembrance of the vertigo comes over you, puts you into a state of anxiety, and is followed by a sensation of tottering and swaying, so that you have to stand still; and at last it has gone so far that you no longer venture to go out alone. And so the hero of X. sits like a timid woman in his arm-chair, making life bitter for himself and for those around him.

Even were I to find that signs of arterial calcification were present, I should still be satisfied that your vertigo is not due to this

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cause, but that it is a vertigo of recollection and of fear.

I can assure you, however, that the changes in your blood-vessels are not in excess of those corresponding to your age, and that with your heart and vascular system you may reach a good, healthy old age.

But you must now rouse yourself up. I want you from to-morrow onwards to go out walking by yourself, and I am sure that in a few weeks you will be going about everywhere without any vertigo.¹—I have the honour to be, etc.

H. O.

¹ This took place.

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MY DEAR MISS A.,

I have noticed with pleasure how much relief you have derived from your conversations with me, and I now desire to amplify the opinions which I gave to you in several points.

As you told me, you have been for many years undergoing unspeakable suffering because you regarded your wonderful, irrepressible fancies as a sign of existing or future insanity. The distress which this idea caused you was from the first intensely aggravated by the rule that you had laid down for yourself never to reveal any of those mental processes, to deny both to your own people and to your doctor any glimpse into your inner life, in order that they should not regard or treat you as mentally unsound. You therefore subjected yourself to a constraint, and a constant tension and agitation which gradually threatened to undermine your healthy nervous condition.

I congratulate you on the fact that at last you have spoken out. How your eyes lighted

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up, how the worry and tension vanished from your face when you saw that I at once understood your trouble!—that in the story which you so hesitatingly revealed to me I found once more exactly what a great number of nervous people experience and have to overcome—when I showed you that your trouble was composed, not of insane fancies, but of irrepressible thoughts, and that these or similar ideas and unconnected thoughts, however distorted and absurd they seem, come also to people who are regarded as mentally normal, and who not infrequently are capable of the highest mental achievements.

Let me once more assure you that you are not mentally affected, and that your condition will never pass into one of insanity. It is not the content of imaginations—however imbecile that may be—that is the determining factor in this matter, but the attitude of the patient towards these ideas.

If he regards and recognises them as aliens, as intruders into his mind which he strives to keep at bay, as imaginations which he distinguishes from his healthy thoughts, then there exists no insanity, but a form of nervous-

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ness, which may indeed be very distressing and intractable, but which does not threaten the mind, and which is quite curable. This is your case, dear madam. Your trouble is not, as you imagine, quite an extraordinary one; it is, I venture to say, one which a neurologist meets almost daily, except that the majority of your fellow-sufferers do not wrap themselves up in themselves so long as you have done, but by obtaining timely relief they suffer less distress and fear. Now that you are enlightened as to the nature of the condition, you are to regard it as a symptom in which nothing terrible is inherent, and of which you have as little reason to be ashamed as of some digestive trouble, so that it is now a simple matter to find the way to recovery.

First of all you must for some time yet speak out unreservedly to me; but then the time will come when all recollection of those ideas must be banished as far as possible by vigorous distraction, by earnest, stimulating, and engrossing work.

I will give you the necessary directions later on, when I know something more with regard to your personality, your capabilities,

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and your inclinations ; but in the meantime I look forward to an early, marked improvement as the result of our conversation.—With kind regards, Yours very truly.

H. O.

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DEAR MRS D.,

For four years now I have treated you, and stage by stage I have guided you from the illness which kept you on your back and deprived your life of all its interests, claims, and pleasures to an active, useful, and not unhappy existence. Now, however, you can dispense with your guide. Certainly, you are not yet well ; you still suffer from abnormal excitability ; your equanimity is still more easily disturbed than in a healthy person, and you are not yet so capable of action and endurance as you might be. But you now know the means by which to overcome your troubles, and the way in which you must press forward.

It will at first be hard for you entirely to give up your guide and companion, but the time has come when you must regain your independence. So long as I feared that if left to yourself you might relapse, I did not venture to leave you. But I am now convinced that this danger is over, and that the consciousness that you are now to stand on your own

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feet will be a powerful incentive to you, and will, I hope, form the last stage on your way to recovery.

The experiences through which I have recently passed with you, urge me once again to lay the following before you: on account of the long duration of your illness, there had developed in you that egotism of the sufferer which always demands attention, which sees in every claim of other people, and especially of the other members of the family, some injury and detriment to its own established rights. It was exceedingly difficult to open your eyes to this characteristic, which frequently brought you into conflict with those around you. But when you came at last to understand and appreciate it, you fought it valiantly, and little by little you succeeded in almost entirely overcoming this utterly morbid egotism. But whenever one of your family was affected by an illness which required special consideration, forbearance, and care, it again gathered strength and threatened to master you. Instantly then the old peculiar trait of character made its re-appearance. You believed yourself neglected, complained that

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your troubles were not receiving the necessary attention and consideration, and you seemed to have suddenly forgotten that this apparent disregard and minimising of your complaints was entirely in accordance with your physician's orders, and that you owed your improvement in no small measure to this attitude of those around you.

I know that I have merely to refer to this point in order to incite you to further self-restraint. But I would have you go further. Interest yourself whenever you can in the welfare of those with whom you are brought into contact, whether of your lady companion or of the members of your own family. You will thus most surely prevent the re-awakening of those morbid ideas which do you so much harm.

Now I must bid you farewell, in the hope that you will prove to me that this, probably my last advice to you, has not fallen on unfruitful soil.

With heartiest wishes for your future welfare,
—I am, Yours very truly, H. O.

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MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

It was very sensible of you to speak openly to me, and I now desire to make what I have already said to you in our conversation more permanent and emphatic by means of this letter.

I have no doubt that your morbid sensations, the pressure on the head, feeling of exhaustion and of weakness, digestive troubles, palpitation of heart, etc., are caused, directly or indirectly, by the propensities in which you have for years indulged. Quite as harmful to you, however, is the oppressive consciousness of guilt which weighs upon you, and the fear of disease with which you distress yourself.

The vice for which you blame yourself is unhappily very widespread among those of your age, and if all who give way to it were to be attacked later on by serious illness, the human race would be in a bad way indeed. As a matter of fact, the majority succeed in flinging off this yoke at the right time, and thus avoiding its injurious effects upon their health. But even when, as in your case, these

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have already been felt, the evil is by no means incurable, and you may yet overcome it by a resolute effort of your strength of will. I can assure you that the number of young men whom I have seen completely cured at this stage is very great, and that those who on the other hand become afflicted with a permanent disease of the nervous system form a vanishing minority. It is certainly time, however, that you should rouse yourself, and that your resolve should be earnest, firm, and strong. To this end I shall give you a few further suggestions. You are now at an age at which this tendency must be entirely overcome, and you must find compensation in quite different directions. In order to set and to keep your imagination free from these memory-pictures, you must occupy yourself as fully as possible with other interests, and particularly with those which will make great demands upon your attention and energy. To this end occupations which possess the stimulus of novelty are well fitted, as are physical exercises and sports, which demand a constant effort of will and an uninterrupted mental alertness. As I have already told you, rowing, sailing, and shooting best fulfil these

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conditions, but gymnastics, fencing, bicycling, and even energetic walking may serve the same purpose. The time which is left over from college and the preparation of your lessons should for the greater part be employed in some such activity. And this will have the very beneficial after-effect of making you tired and in want of sleep when evening comes.

I should also be glad to see you cultivate a social life. You might join a gymnastic club, a choral union, a dancing club, or some such society; in fact you should cultivate everything which would draw you from your solitude, and would afford you pleasure in the company of your friends and comrades as far as your time will permit. You must not grow into a pedant or a prig. Moderate smoking will do you no harm, but you should avoid the use of alcohol. Even the least degree of intoxication may leave you relaxed in will, and may shatter your painfully acquired self-control. Avoid also as much as possible all heavy meals, especially in the evening.

And now, you must just aim at complete renunciation: I know you have the strength for it. If, however, there should be a relapse,

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which I do not expect, I entreat you again to tell me of it. You must have some one to whom you can wholly confide this matter, and who will be able to be a stay and support to you should your own strength at any time prove insufficient.

Now, away with the past, rejoice in your youth, which to you also should be the time of "sunniest sunshine." As soon as you have become a student, we shall have a further conversation upon this theme.—With kindest greetings, Yours,

H. O.

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